

Private Sewage System Maintenance Program – Frequently Asked Questions

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This document was prepared to answer the more common questions related to private sewage system maintenance requirements in Dane County. Please review the following information if you have questions about the private sewage system maintenance program. If this document does not answer your question, please feel free to contact our office by email at privateseptic@publichealthmdc.com or call at 242-6515.

Question:

How much is the private septic maintenance fee?

Answer:

Property owners with private septic systems are charged \$8.67 per system annually.

Question:

My property is tax exempt, how will I be billed for private septic maintenance fee?

Answer:

Tax exempt properties that have private sewage systems will receive a document that looks like a property tax bill but it will only have the private septic maintenance fee listed on the bill. No taxes will be charged on the bill.

Question:

What is the required maintenance for a private septic system?

Answer:

Maintenance of a private septic system depends on the specific components of the system. For basic systems, maintenance involves an inspection of the tanks to determine the condition of the tank, baffles, and mechanical equipment in the tank. Inspection of the distribution system is also necessary to ensure wastewater is draining properly. More advanced systems, such as those with aerobic treatment units, require inspection and servicing of the treatment components. Septic tanks must be pumped periodically to ensure proper operation of the system. Inspection and pumping of septic systems must be performed by an appropriately licensed professional. Certified septage pumpers can be found listed in the yellow pages or on the WI Department of Natural resources website at www.dnr.wi.gov/org/es/science/opcert/BusinessList.pdf.

Question:

How frequently is maintenance required for a private septic system?

Answer:

WI Dept of Safety and Professional Services rules (COMM 83.52) require that private septic system owners perform maintenance on their systems on a schedule specific to the components that make up their system. Most systems in Dane County are required to have an inspection performed of their system once every three years. Some systems with advanced treatment components may require more frequent inspection and servicing, some as frequently as every 6 – 12 months. If you are not sure if your system needs more frequent maintenance, you can check with your septic pumper or you can contact our office at 242-6515 or privateseptic@publichealthmdc.com. You may also get this information from your private sewage system plans from when it was originally installed. Septic tanks are often pumped every three years at the same time as inspection to allow for a thorough inspection of the tanks. However, pumping of a septic tank is not required until the tank is 1/3rd full of scum or sludge. Properties served by a holding tank must have the tank pumped as soon as they fill up.

Question:

Who is responsible for submitting septic system maintenance reports?

Answer:

Private sewage system owners are responsible for getting their system inspection and maintenance completed and ensuring that this information is reported to our Department. Some professionals are willing to submit the maintenance report for their customers as a service. Now that the reporting fee is not collected along with the maintenance report, more professionals may be willing to submit maintenance reports for their clients. System owners must be clear with their professional about who will submit the maintenance report.

Question:

Why does Dane County need a private septic system maintenance program?

Answer:

The purpose of the septic system maintenance program is to prevent septic system failures or to identify them as quickly as possible. This helps to minimize the potential harm that such failures can generate to human health or the environment, specifically to groundwater. Private septic systems are an environmentally safe and effective means for handling domestic wastewater when public sewer utilities are not available. However, without proper maintenance, these systems may fail and result in human health hazards in the home or business they serve or in the environment. Septic system failure may also lead to contamination of groundwater with disease-causing organisms or toxic chemicals. Regular maintenance of a septic system may also prolong the useful life of the system and delay the costs of replacing the system.

Question:

Why does Dane County charge a septic maintenance fee?

Answer:

The septic maintenance fee is charged to fund the private septic system inspection program operated by Public Health Madison and Dane County. This program was initially adopted in 1979 as a requirement for participation in the Wisconsin Fund Grant Program offered by the State of Wisconsin and covered new systems installed in Dane County. The program was expanded in 1997 to include all private sewage systems. When this program was created, the Dane County Board of Supervisors decided that it was most appropriate to fund this program by charging the owners of private septic systems a fee to cover the costs of the program. This cost was not applied to general tax revenue because many Dane County residents already pay to have their wastewater handled by a public sewage utility.

Question:

What does the private septic system maintenance program do?

Answer:

To minimize the risk or impact of private septic system failure, program personnel do the following:

- Maintain an inventory of all active private septic systems in Dane County.
- Issue notices to owners of all private septic systems reminding them of when they are due to submit their maintenance report.
- Review maintenance and pumping reports for active septic systems to assure systems are operating properly.
- Take enforcement action when necessary to correct any problems reported on maintenance reports or to ensure compliance with reporting requirements. Enforcement action may include issuance of orders and citations, investigation of property condition and ownership, and referral to Dane County Corporation Counsel for further legal action.
- Consult with property owners on proper maintenance and care of septic systems, and
- Ensure that septic systems that no longer function properly or meet state or local regulations are abandoned properly.

Question:

I don't have a private septic system; will I be charged this fee?

Answer:

No. Only property owners with private septic systems on their property will be billed this fee. If you recently abandoned the septic system on your property, you should make sure that you have reported this abandonment to our office. Prompt notification of septic system abandonments is helpful in preventing a private septic maintenance fee from being charged in years following the system abandonment. To find out if your system abandonment has been reported, please email privateseptic@publichealthmdc.com or call 242-6515.

Question:

What should I do if I am charged the fee but I do not have a system?

Answer:

If your system has been abandoned but has not been reported to Public Health Madison and Dane County as abandoned, the property owner will be responsible to pay the reporting fee until the abandonment is properly reported to our office. To address this problem, work with the professionals that abandoned your septic system to complete the abandonment report form and submit the form to our office. The year that you submit your system abandonment form will be the last year that you pay the maintenance fee for that system.

If your system was abandoned and properly reported but a mistake on our end led to a septic maintenance fee being charged, we will work with you and your local municipal clerk or treasurer to adjust the fee. It is important that you notify us as soon as possible after you notice a potential error so that corrections can be made before the taxes are due. Corrections after the taxes are due are possible but more complicated to address.